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IN U-TURN, SUPREME COURT GREEN-LIGHTS RATH YATRA

Four days after it stayed the Puri Rath Yatra due to Covid-19, the top court on Monday let it proceed with restrictions

PUBLIC BARRED FROM PARTICIPATING

Monday's decision by the Supreme Court follows assurances from the Centre and the Odisha government that all Covid-19 precautions will be followed during the event. "In Puri, we will impose a curfew, the yatra will be held only by the servitors. We won't allow public participation," an advocate appearing for the Odisha government told the apex court | P7

CHARIOT FESTIVAL ONLY IN PURI

- SC directed the Odisha government to ensure each Rath would be pulled by less than 500 people, all tested negative for Covid-19
- A curfew has been imposed in Puri. People have been told not to step out of their homes when the chariot procession takes place
- The festival will be held only in Puri and no other parts of Odisha

5,160

IS THE TOTAL CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES IN ODISHA AS OF MONDAY

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Over 10-hour meeting of Corps Commanders ends

No information on talks outcome yet; Army chief plans to visit Leh this week; Chinese commander too died in the June 15 face-off

An Indian fighter jet flies over a mountain range near Leh in Ladakh, where forces have been given a free hand to respond to Chinese aggression on the border | AFP

MAYANK SINGH AND PUSHKAR BANAKAR @ New Delhi

A marathon meeting of Corps Commanders of India and China got wrapped up late on Monday night, indicating the intricacies involved in the border stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). There was no immediate word on its outcome though. Also, the Indian Army decided to harden its stance on deployments along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh.

"The over 10-hour meeting ended around 10 pm," a senior officer informed. The Army confirmed that Lt General Harinder Singh, head of Leh-based 14 Corps, held his second round of talks with Major General Lin Liu, commander of the People's Liberation Army in South Xinjiang region.

The meeting is important as tensions along the border have soared after the June 15 attack on Indian soldiers by Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley leading to casualties on both sides.

Sources said that the Army is also preparing to strengthen its defences, with senior officers from the Operations Branch visiting Leh in quick succession. Army Chief General M M Naravane is likely to make a trip to Leh next week and take stock of the situation on the ground, said another source.

All seven Army commanders have gathered in Delhi for the Annual Army Commanders Conference in which the standoff was discussed on Monday. It is expected to be taken up again on Tuesday in the presence of the Army Chief as also the vice chief.

Troops of 3 Division of the Army are directly handling the stand-off. They are strongly supported by troops of two other divisions. Also, the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) has been put on standby, informed sources.

While India has been open about its fatality in the deadly fight on June 15, China continues to play ostrich. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian on Monday said he had no information about the Chinese casualties, a day after Union minister and former Army Chief General V K Singh revealed that at least 40 Chinese soldiers were killed. India declared the death of its 20 soldiers, including the commanding officer of its local unit, and injuries to around 70 others.

Meanwhile, sources said that External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also told the all-party meeting on Friday that a Chinese commander had been killed in the face-off. The meeting was also told that Colonel B Santosh Babu had sustained head injuries and was killed in action. Zhao, however, reiterated that China and India are in communication with each other to resolve the situation on the ground through diplomatic and military channels.

Manmohan assails Modi, Nadda hits back at ex-PM

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

FORMER prime minister Manmohan Singh on Monday advised his successor Narendra Modi to always be mindful of the implications of his words in the Chinese context, drawing a sharp retort from BJP chief J P Nadda. Singh told Modi that China should not be allowed to use his words as a vindication of their position. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, too, wondered why China was praising the PM.

Singh's remarks came after the PM, during an all-party meeting last week — following the killing of 20 Indian soldiers by Chinese troops in Galwan in Ladakh on June 15 — said, "Neither has anyone entered Indian territory, nor is anyone present in Indian territory currently, and nor is any Indian post captured."

Singh pressed on, saying: "We remind the government that disinformation is no substitute for diplomacy or decisive leadership. The truth cannot be suppressed by having pliant allies spout comforting but false statements."

However, Nadda pounced on Singh, saying that it was under his watch that China illegally occupied vast tracts of land, besides launching not less than 600 incursions across the Line of Actual Control (LAC). "Dear Dr. Singh and Congress Party, Please stop insulting our forces repeatedly, questioning their valour. You did this post the air xtrikes (Balakot) and surgical strikes. Please understand the true meaning of national unity, especially in such times. It's never too late to improve," Nadda tweeted.

Rahul Gandhi added to the Twitter war, saying: "China killed our soldiers. China took our land. Then, why is China praising Mr Modi during this conflict." He tagged a news report in the Chinese media that lauded Modi's concluding address at an all-party meeting on the Ladakh situation.

IT'S TIME FOR RIC DIPLOMACY

The next diplomatic push could come from the virtual Russia, India, China (RIC) foreign ministers' conference that begins today. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar was not keen on sharing space with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi, but was persuaded by Russia to relent.

Russia has taken a cautious and measured approach to the LAC situation and urged both sides to resolve disputes through dialogue | P9

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa chairs a meeting of his ministers and officials at his home office 'Krishna' in Bengaluru on Monday | EXPRESS

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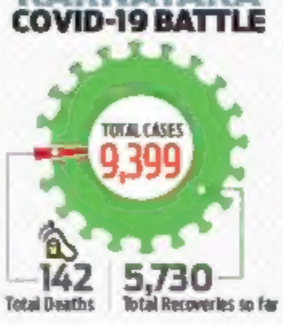
TEST POSITIVE ON MONDAY

KARNATAKA COVID-19 BATTLE



- For the third day in a row, Bengaluru Urban district tops count with 126 cases
- Senior IPS officers in Mysuru district in home quarantined after constable in Nanjangud tests positive
- Positivity rate in Dharwad district triples
- Kodagu district reports two fresh cases

K'taka to seal down hotspot clusters

ANUSHA RAVI @Bengaluru

FOLLOWING a spike in Covid-19 cases, especially in marketplaces and wards attached to marketplaces, the Karnataka government has decided to seal down hotspot clusters and their adjoining streets.

Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Monday held an emergency meeting to tackle the spike in cases across the state, especially Bengaluru, where a decision was taken to seal Kalasipalya, KR Market, Chamarajpet and Chickpet till July 1. Yediyurappa is learnt to have pushed for stricter lockdown in clusters but without adversely impacting economic activities.

"The number of cases is increasing at an alarming rate in Bengaluru. Stringent lockdown measures need to be implemented. Covid-19 should be contained without affecting the economic activity," Yediyurappa is said to have told the officials.

Currently, the administration is sealing down just the house where a Covid case is reported. But at the meeting, it was decided to completely seal down even adjoining roads in BBMP wards that have reported more than three cases.

At present, Siddapura, VV Puram, Vidyaranyapura, Kalasipalaya and areas around Dharmaraya Temple are prone to multiple cases of Covid-19. A similar strategy will be followed in districts like Yadgir, Ballari and Kalaburagi, where there is a spurt of cases, government sources said.

CONTINUED ON: P7

Realty dawns as revenues from sector grow

RAMU PATIL @Bengaluru

THERE is no sign of the Covid-19 curve flattening anytime soon, but at the same time the economy that had taken a body blow due to the lockdown is showing strong indications of bouncing back.

The state's revenues from the real estate sector, which had hit rock bottom in the beginning of the financial year, are steadily increasing over the last few weeks.

The sub-registrar's offices started functioning from April 24, and that month, the Stamps and Registration Department raised just ₹29 crore from registration of properties, which is abysmal compared to ₹679 crore revenue for the corresponding period last year. It started recovering in May this year, when the revenues went up to ₹397 crore, but that too was much less compared to ₹1,058 crore raised during the same period last year.

Department sources said that revenue generation from registration of properties picked up pace in the first half of this month (June). Up to June 19, the revenue collection from registration of over 1.13 lakh documents stood at ₹477.76 crore. This was slightly better than the number of documents registered and revenue generated in the corresponding period in 2019-20, or the average of last three years. P3

SKILL HUNTING

MNREGA RUSH: GOVT TO FIND GRADS JOBS

ASHWINI M SRIPAD @ Bengaluru

WITH desperate graduates, postgraduates and skilled workers, for lack of suitable employment, enrolling themselves under the bread-and-butter MNREGA scheme in droves, the state government is coming to their rescue by finding them jobs based on their skills by conducting job fairs and directing them to the Skill Development Department for better placement.

> They (workers) can register through the Kayaka Mitra mobile app, while many labour organisations too are helping them enrol under MNREGA
>
> LK Ateeq, Principal Secretary RDPR Department

As the lockdown started taking effect, tens of thousands of migrant workers returned to their villages and registered themselves under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Over the last two-and-a-half months of this fiscal, 2.23 lakh new MNREGA job cards have been issued, while during the same period last year, 78,454 people had registered under the scheme, which is almost a three-fold increase in registrations.

This year, the state government has targeted to reach 13 crore man-days, for which Rs 6,315.79 crore has been allocated, including the Central government's share. Of the 13 crore man-days (100 days for one worker), the state has already crossed 3.3 crore man-days. Also, Rs 275 per day that the Karnataka government pays is more than what is assigned in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu. The only exception being Kerala, which pays more than Karnataka.

Officials of the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) Department had not expected this surge in registrations, but are trying to help the workers. "They can register through the Kayaka Mitra mobile app, while many labour organisations too are helping them enrol under MNREGA," RDPR Principal Secretary LK Ateeq told *The New Indian Express*.

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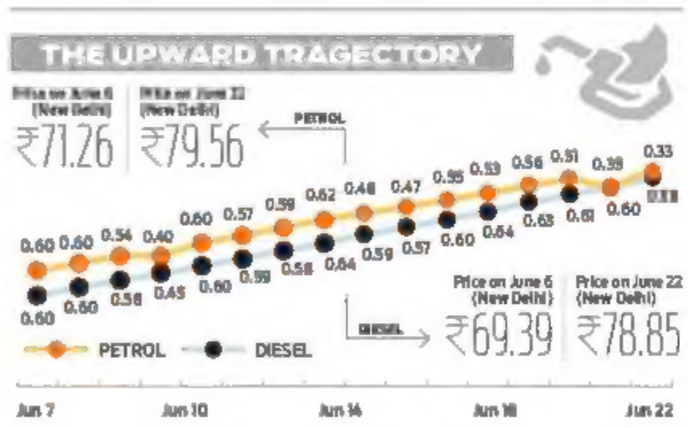

Transporters hit as fuel cost goes North, jacks up freight rates

JONATHAN ANANDA @New Delhi

MONDAY marked the sixteenth straight day of fuel price hikes for Indian consumers, petrol and diesel rates having surged by a record ₹8.30 and ₹9.46 per litre respectively in little over a fortnight. The day's diesel prices reached yet another all-time high — ₹78.85 per litre in New Delhi — while petrol was being sold just shy of the ₹80 per litre mark at ₹79.56.

This steep rise is already having a marked impact on the cost of road freight transport. According to S P Singh, senior fellow at the Indian Foundation of Transport Research and Training (IFTRT), truck rental rates have increased by as much as 10-12 per cent over the fortnight beginning June 7.

"The impact of the fuel price hikes has been observed on trunk routes pan-India," he said, adding that freight costs had already been rising over the summer. "Very low demand meant transporters weren't able to get assured return loads and tried to protect their margins," he noted.

Livelihood of 20 crore tied to the sector

India's fleet of commercial trucks currently stands at over one crore light, medium and heavy-duty trucks. Around 20 crore people are dependent on it, according to All India Motor Transport Congress

Transporters say, however, that the increase in freight prices has been "nowhere close" to the over 20 per cent rise in diesel rates seen over the summer in places like Delhi.

"We are in a position where we cannot pass on the full impact of the fuel hike to consumers. Prices are a factor of demand and supply, and both remain very low," said Naveen Kumar Gupta, secretary general, All India Motor Transport Congress. He also pointed out that since fuel prices are revised daily, it was very difficult to factor in these changes for trips that generally last over several days.

"Most transporters are currently running on huge losses and over 60 per cent of the fleet remains idle," Gupta said. Singh agreed: "Current fleet utilisation is only at around 30-35 per cent."

Around 20 crore people are dependent on the commercial truck sector. "Even if we do pass on the entire impact, these 20 crore people will still be affected, since prices of food and other articles on the ground will also increase," Gupta pointed out. CONTINUED ON: P13

EXPRESS READ

Exports improving, says Goyal

New Delhi: India's exports are showing signs of improvement as the contraction in outbound shipments in June so far has come down to about 10-12 per cent, as compared with 60 per cent in April, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Monday. P13

5 mission officials return from Pak

Attari (Amritsar): Five officials of the Indian High Commission in Pakistan, including the two who were arrested and later released in an alleged hit-and-run case there, returned to the country through the Attari-Wagah border on Monday, officials said in a statement. P10

Bihar flood threat as Nepal stops repair of embankment

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @Patna

THE Nepal government has blocked Bihar officials from carrying out repair works on a section of the Gandak embankment that sits on a piece of no man's land along the India-Nepal border. Barricades have been put up there to prevent the movement of men, materials and machinery from the Indian side.

Sources said that the repair work, being carried out by Bihar's Water Resource Department, has been going on for a long time. But on June 15, the Nepal Armed Border Force (NABF) reached the spot and halted the work. The district administration promptly alerted the state government.

Bihar Water Resource Minister Sanjay Kumar Jha on Monday confirmed the development.

"This is for the first time that Nepal has resorted to an act putting a barrier to stop movement of material, men and machinery from the Indian side," Jha said, adding that the Ministry of External Affairs has been apprised of the situation.

"The Gandak Barrage has 36 gates, half of which fall on our side. Repair of these has been completed by our engineers. However, when we tried to cross over to the other side for doing the needful for the remaining 18 gates, maintenance of which is carried out by us, we found the barricades," Jha said.